

God's Interpreter

The Interpreting Angel in Post-Exilic Prophetic Visions of the Old Testament

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1. Introduction

Some books of the Latter or Writing Prophets include vision reports which form a genre of its own in prophetic literature. In these a prophet is privileged to gain special insight into the divine sphere. Either is he allowed to catch a glimpse of God himself, or he sees something which foreshadows events that are about to happen in the human world and which may be represented in a metaphorical or symbolic way. Obviously it is no problem for an OT prophet to recognize a vision of God and his immediate environment – as in Am 7:7f.; Isa 6; Ezek 1 and 10. If the vision has a metaphorical quality there is often, though not always¹, a comment or explanation, i.e. an audition accompanying or following the vision as such. God himself provides the interpretation – as in Am 7:7f.; 8:1f.; Jer 1:11f., 13f.; 24:1-10². Now, there are a few instances of visions where the prophet sees enigmatic things or beings that needs must be explained to him (and his recipients). Without any help the prophet could make absolutely nothing of it. However, help is not provided by YHWH himself, but by an interpreter belonging to the divine sphere, by an angel. This phenomenon occurs in Zechariah's night visions (Zech 1-6) and in Daniel's visions (Dan 7-12), accounts of visions that are undoubtedly of post-exilic origin. As critics often also include Ezek 40-48 in their investigation of the *angelus interpres* in OT prophecy, we will consider the “man” in this vision as well, at least briefly.

1 In Am 7:1-3; 4-6 it is evident for Amos that the locusts and the fire are omens of judgement.

2 These follow the pattern: God asks the prophet what he sees, the prophet answers describing the vision, God explains what it means in terms of his future plans.

2. Zechariah's Night Visions (Zech 1:7-6:8*)

Recent investigations and commentaries agree almost unanimously that there is an original cycle of seven visions in Zech 1-6³ which has been composed deliberately as a literary unit using a concentric structure⁴. Thus this cycle is interpreted as a literary product, not in terms of a report of an authentic visionary experience⁵. The cycle has been expanded by the later insertion of an eighth vision (3:1-7, with an explication in 3:8-10) different in nature as compared with the original ones, and further additional material (4:6b-10a; 1:16f.; 2:10-17; 6:9-15)⁶. A redactor clearly marks the opening of the night visions by the date in 1:7 (February 15, 519 BCE); in 7:1 we find another date (December 7, 518 BCE) as heading of a complex of oracles so that the cycle of visions has come to an end here.

The composition of the seven visions follows both the principle of a stereotyped pattern and of slight variation. The basic constellation is the visionary and first person narrator Zechariah communicating to the reader what he experienced during the night (הַלְּילָה 1:8). The present text giving the dates in 1:7 and 7:1 suggests that Zechariah witnessed all seven visions during one single night. The setting at night as well as the remark in 4:1 (the angel waking him) associate that the experience resembles a dream⁷. So it is a surrealistic world that Zechariah is privileged to enter. No wonder there are beings in it whom one does not meet everyday. The most prominent is a figure called **הַמֶּלֶךְ הַזֶּבֶר בַּי** “the messenger / angel who spoke with me”⁸. The dialogue between the visionary and this special angel accompanies the sequence of visions as a running commentary. For the most part the angel explains the strange sights to Zechariah, and thereby at the same time to the reader. The Book of Zechariah is the first writing in the OT that clearly presents an angel (even using the term מַלְאָךְ) functioning as an interpreter.

How is the interpreting angel introduced? To answer this question we have to consider the first vision more closely. After the date given in 1:7 which characterizes the following section as YHWH's word hap-

3 Zech 1:7-15; 2:1-4; 2:5-9; 4:1-6a,10b-14; 5:1-4; 5:5-11; 6:1-8. Cf. e.g. Gese, Anfang 25; Seybold, Bilder 11-23; Behrens, Visionsschilderungen.

4 Cf. e.g. Seybold, Bilder 35; Reventlow, Propheten 39f.; Hanhart, Sacharja 51; Behrens, Visionsschilderungen 274.

5 Cf. e.g. Gese, Anfang 36-38; Seybold, Bilder 31-39.

6 Cf. most recently Behrens, Visionsschilderungen 273f.

7 North, Prophecy 48: “Characteristic of dream however is the combination of images never experienced together in real life.”

8 Zech 1:9, 13, 14; 2:2, 7; 4:1, 4, 5; 5:5, 10; 6:4.

pening to the prophet Zechariah, the point of view switches from the third person to the first person narrative, namely Zechariah's perspective. YHWH's word actually consisted in a number of visions the prophet is now recapitulating (רִאִיתִי, 1:8). The presentative particle **הַנָּה** indicates the beginning of the description of what Zechariah perceived in this extraordinary state of mind, namely a man riding on a reddish horse and halting between two myrtle trees in the glen. There are more horses of differing colours behind him (1:8). Zechariah sees and describes, but he does not understand whom he sees and what the sight means. That is why he asks "What are they?" (1:9a) adding an address, **אֶלְנִי** "my lord", implying that there is someone present to answer him. Theoretically speaking there are several possibilities as to whom the prophet directs his words: (1) Zechariah is addressing God as he is aware of the extraordinary character of the experience. This would fit in with the theological usage of the word **אֶלְנִי** referring to God (cf. Isa 6:8), especially as an address (Cf. Isa 6:11; Ezek 9:8; 11:13)⁹. One might imagine that God reacts to the question by sending the interpreting angel who is there out of a sudden to talk to Zechariah. (2) Zechariah addresses the man on horseback, i.e. an element of the vision. As there is a human figure in the vision Zechariah may expect that the man is able to talk to him and to introduce himself¹⁰. And indeed, 1:10 has the rider answer (cf. 1:10a introducing the speech)¹¹. (3) Zechariah addresses the interpreting angel (as in 4:4, 5, 13; 6:4). Then it would be taken for granted that he has emerged at the same time as the vision or even from the vision. Anyway, the *angelus interpres* is not explicitly introduced, just characterized by the phrase **הַמְלָאֵךְ בָּי** here and throughout the visions.

The angel who is talking to Zechariah is an intermediary figure. He belongs to the divine sphere. Therefore, he is representing YHWH **אֶלְנִי** as interpreter of the vision. In this sense the angel is not a part of the vision, but an observer like Zechariah, though an observer initiated into the secret visionary world. At the same time the interpreting angel seems to have the opportunity also to cross the line and to exert influence on or to enter the visualized sphere. Hence his announcement, "I'll let you see what these are" (1:9bβ), may be understood as prompting the man's answer (1:10, and also 1:11b). In 5:8 he will thrust the woman

9 In Ezek 9:8 **אֶלְנִי** is combined with YHWH as it is the rule within the book. Hanhart, Sacharja 80, mentions the fact that the word is used as an address to angels in Gen 18:3 and 19:18.

10 Cf. Zech 2:5-6 as an equivalent of this option.

11 However, BHS suggests that "the man standing between the myrtle trees" is an addition.

symbolizing wickedness back into the barrel and slam the lid shut before two winged women appear and carry the barrel off. In 6:7b he will order the horses to patrol the world.

In fact, the passage Zech 1:8-15 as it now stands is rather confusing for the reader¹². The terms מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה, אֵשׁ, and מֶלֶךְ all refer to an angelic being – traditionally angels in the OT are sometimes just called נֶשֶׁמֶת, and it is only through their behaviour and their special capabilities that one can guess at their divine nature. The problem in Zech 1 is that on the one hand it seems clear that there are two different angelic beings present here – the man on horseback as an emissary seeking information about the world, and the angel talking to the visionary¹³. On the other hand the contours of the two are strangely blurred. This fact underlines the extraordinary quality of Zechariah's visionary experience, its dream-like, even surrealistic touch. Obviously, redactional activities tried to make the identity of the two heavenly beings clearer, especially by introducing the term מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה which might refer to both¹⁴.

When one tries to interpret the text as it now stands it might read as follows: The interpreting angel reacts to Zechariah's question (1:9) and prompts the speech of the man who explains that they, i.e. the horses, have been sent to patrol the world¹⁵ (1:10). Then these emissaries¹⁶ give their report (1:11aβ). It is addressed to "YHWH's angel halting be

12 This is why parts of the text have been eliminated or emended, cf. BHS and commentaries.

13 According to Seybold, Bilder 53 note 13, there is no need to change MT, except for the apposition in 1:11aβ. To him there are four different persons: the interpreting angel (1:9), the commander of the riders that is the man between the myrtle trees (1:8, 10); the squad of riders (1:11) and YHWH's messenger answering the riders and pronouncing the lament (1:12).

To Reventlow, Propheten 41, all three terms designate only one and the same being, the change is just due to stylistic reasons (one wonders, however, what these might be). Therefore he takes the intermediary angel as a figure within the vision, not as an interpreter detached from it. An important point for him is the fact that the angel may interfere with the visionary events (2:7; 5:8; 6:3b). But of course, this need not mean that the angel is part of the vision; as he is a divine agent he is free to act on different levels. Cf. Hanhart, Sacharja 76-80: The interpreting angel is identified with the man on horseback, i.e. is part of the vision tableau which he explains at the same time. He is the only one talking besides Zechariah so that there are only two of them: the prophet and the angel.

14 If it refers to the interpreting angel one has to eliminate at least "standing between the myrtle trees" in 1:11a.

15 Note that the phrase הַלְּכָה hitp. + בָּאָרֶץ will be repeated in 6:7. It also describes the activity of the satan in Job 1:7 and 2:2, i.e. of a celestial being. Cf. Hanhart, Sacharja 71, and Delkurt, Nachtgesichte 49f.

16 Most readers take it for granted that there are riders on all the horses. The text does not say so, however. As these horses are celestial ones they might as well be celestial beings able to speak.

tween the myrtle trees" (1:11aα). This remark identifies the "man" (1:8) with YHWH's angel¹⁷. Considering the apparent biblical tradition which calls an angel both "man" and (later) YHWH's messenger / angel (e.g. Gen 19) it seems probable that a redactor wanted to make clear that the man on horseback is also an angel, one active within the world as a commander of the squad of emissaries. When he has heard the report that everything is calm he reacts to this message by addressing God and pronouncing a lament (1:12)¹⁸. This prompts YHWH's comforting¹⁹ answer which he gives to the interpreting angel (1:13). Obviously, Zechariah perceives that God is saying something, but he cannot understand the words²⁰. Therefore, the angel tells him God's words (1:14a) and quotes them (1:14b, 15). He also orders Zechariah to make these words known (אָמַרְתָּ)²¹. So, the structure is rather complicated which is possibly due to the genesis of the passage. Trying to reconstruct an original version would be highly speculative, though. The present text illustrates that Zechariah enters an alien world inhabited by angelic beings with different functions. But note that the crucial message of the passage is given in god's final speech – the visionary elements only gradually lead to this climax²². The visionary elements create a certain atmosphere, but they do not contain or transport the important message as such.

The following six visions²³ of the original cycle are less complicated with regard to the interpreting angel: each vision begins with the remark that the first person narrator looks up²⁴ and sees something. The

17 Cf. Jeremias, *Nachtgesichte* 85.

18 Most critics (with the exception of Seybold, *Bilder* 53 note 13, and Delkurt, *Nachtgesichte* 65) rather have the interpreting angel utter the lament because this fits in with their concept of the intermediary addressing God and transmitting God's word. The lament may be representative of the feelings of Zechariah and his contemporary readers.

19 Note that the Masoretic accents attribute comforting words to YHWH and good words to the angel.

20 Cf. Behrens, *Visionsschilderungen* 282.

21 This made commentators think that the passage is a call narrative, cf. e.g. Delkurt, *Nachtgesichte* 72f.

22 Cf. Delkurt, *Nachtgesichte* 84. As Hanhart, *Sacharja* 133, has it, the interpretation dominates the imagery.

23 The fact that the interpreting angel is missing in 3:1-7 is an important aspect indicating that this (eighth) vision was inserted later. Cf. e.g. Seybold, *Bilder* 17; Behrens, *Visionsschilderungen* 302f.

In 3:1-7 we find YHWH's angel confronting the satan. The two opponents are both acting within the vision and do not have any contact with the visionary.

24 As a rule it says *וְשָׁאָמַרְתָּ* (2:1, 5); in 5:1 and 6:1 there is a variation by saying that he did this once again (*וְשָׁאָמַרְתָּ*); in 5:5 the interpreting angel orders him to look up and see. As there are two stages within the visions in 2:1-4 and 5:5-11, the phrase is

description of the visualized begins with the presentative particle **ונָה**²⁵. The visionary then asks the interpreting angel, whom he keeps addressing as **אֶלְנִי**²⁶, what it is he is witnessing (**מַה־אָלָה**²⁷), and the angel answers explaining the vision (2:5-9 is the only exception). As a rule he does so with his own words, except in 1:8-15 where he makes the characters in the vision talk and later on when he quotes God's word. In 2:8b, 9 and 5:4 he again quotes YHWH.

There are only two more instances where conditions are not quite clear at first glance. In the third vision (2:5-9) Zechariah sees a man with a measuring line in his hand (2:5). When Zechariah asks him directly²⁸ where he is going, the man answers (not the interpreting angel): He is about to measure the area of Jerusalem. Especially when bearing in mind the date given in 1:7, this associates preparations for rebuilding the city. Only then the interpreting angel emerges again²⁹. Another angel comes forth to encounter him, i.e. the interpreting angel (2:7) and he, that is the interpreting angel³⁰, tells him to run and address "the young man over there" with quoting God's promise that there will be no need of erecting new city walls as God himself will be a wall of fire protecting Jerusalem. Now, who is the "young man"? Is it (a) the man with the measuring line, or (b) Zechariah? If it is (a) the man who is about to measure, the second angel's message would imply that the man's activity was intended to prepare the (re-)erection of Jerusalem's city walls³¹. The second angel then has to revoke the man's commission

repeated in 5:9; 2:3 is an exception to the rule as it says "YHWH made me see", the only instance where an activity is attributed to God himself. The phrase is missing only in 4:1, i.e. within the central vision which is instead emphasized by the angel's initiative: He wakes Zechariah and asks him what he sees (4:1-2a).

25 Cf. 1:8; 2:1, 5 (7); 4:2; 5:1, 7, 9; 6:1. It is missing only in the second part of 2:1-4, namely in 2:3f.

26 Cf. 4:4, 5, 13; 6:4. Cf. Jeremias, *Nachtgesichte* 101f.

27 1:9; 2:2, 4; 4:4, 11, 12; 5:6; 6:4. Again, there are exceptions: in 2:6 he asks the man in the vision where he is about to go, and twice the angel asks Zechariah what he sees (4:“; 5:2).

28 Gese, *Anfang* 27 note 35, wants to change the text so that the question is addressed to the interpreting angel who will answer it.

29 Καὶ, LXX reads *εἰστηκεῖ* which would be an equivalent to **וְנָה**. Is Καὶ due to an *aberration oculi* then?

30 Almost unanimously scholars think that the interpreting angel gives the second angel the order to run to the man with the measuring line, cf. Gese, *Anfang* 28 note 36; Reventlow, *Propheten* 47; Hanhart, *Sacharja* 141; Vincent, *Herrlichkeit*, 104; Delkurt, *Nachtgesichte* 112. Cf. also Love, Text 58ff, discussing the problem of identifying speakers in Zech 1-8.

31 The text, however, does not say anything explicitly here about the city walls. Most critics (except Vincent, *Herrlichkeit* 114, and Delkurt, *Nachtgesichte* 112ff.) take this for granted because of God's promise to be a wall of fire.

as Jerusalem will not need any fortifications³². It might also be (b) Zechariah³³ who gets additional information, namely that the measuring activity is not a preparation for rebuilding defensive walls, but to measure the enlarged extension of the city. The vision's climax³⁴ then would be God's promise to protect Jerusalem – rebuilt and abounding in human and animal residents.

The third and last instance is found in the end of the last vision (6:8). After explaining the last vision of the four chariots and sending them to patrol the world, the interpreting angel cries out to the visionary saying: "Those going in northern direction let *my* spirit rest in the northern country". As **הָנֶר** belongs to God himself, this statement of the angel appears to be God's own word because of the first person singular suffix³⁵. So at the end of the visionary cycle or the dream sequence, the interpreting angel becomes so to speak transparent: he is at least God's mouthpiece, if not God himself. This blurring happens only when the visionary experience comes to an end.

The strange things Zechariah sees in this sequence of visions turn out to be highly metaphorical illustrations that need explanation. The interpreting angel functioning as God's representative provides the visionary with these explanations. This is his primary function. In addition, he directs the prophet's attention, and he sometimes interferes with the scenes visualized so that the line between an observing level and external point of view framing the observed metaphorical scenery is sometimes blurred, especially so in the beginning (1:8-15) and in the end (6:8) – and maybe in the third vision. The fact that the angel also performs actions implies that he is not only a voice, but a visible person as well.

The Book of Zechariah is the first OT writing to introduce an interpreting angel (quite officially using the term **מַלְאָכֵי**), so that he is clearly a post-exilic phenomenon. Often critics refer to Ezek 40-48 as the origin of the *angelus interpres*³⁶. So we will consider this next.

32 Thus e.g. Stendebach, Prophetie 28; Tigchelaar, Prophets 65, thinks that the surveying angel represents the exiles.

33 Is **עַל**, then, a kind of technical term for the prophet alluding to Jer 1:6) viz. for the elected like Salomo? For this cf. Delkurt, Nachtgesichte 114-116.

34 For the possibility that the second part of the vision (2:5-6) is to surpass the first (2:7-9) cf. Vincent, Herrlichkeit 120, and Delkurt, Nachtgesichte.

35 Again, there have been emendations of the text: **הָנֶר יְהָוָה** (BHS).

36 Jeremias, Nachtgesichte 90, 100. North, Prophecy 67: "a place cannot be assigned definitely to Zechariah without fully taking issue on where Ezekiel stands."

3. The Man with the Measuring Line in Ezekiel's Final Vision (Ezek 40-48)

The last chapters of the Book of Ezekiel (40-48) describe Ezekiel's final vision of future salvation: In a rapture he sees a new Temple and learns about the new organisation of Israel. The introductory passage (40:1-4) resembles the opening lines of Ezekiel's former vision reports (1-3; 8-11) which indicates the redactional intention to link these three visions, namely: the vision of God including Ezekiel's call, the vision of judgement, and the vision of salvation. For a start there is a date (cf. 1:1f.; 8:1), here it is the last and latest one in the book, the year being doubly defined as the 25th year after the first deportation and the 14th year after Jerusalem's destruction (40:1a). The formula designating the beginning of an extraordinary experience follows: YHWH's hand takes hold of Ezekiel and carries him off (40:1b; cf. 1:3; 8:1 and also 37:1). The phrase **בְּמִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים** emphasizes the visionary character of the experience (40:2a α , cf. 1:1b β ; 8:3b α). Ezekiel is taken to a very high mountain in the land of Israel; on its southern slope he discerns something like a city – this is, of course, Mount Zion and the new Temple of Jerusalem³⁷. So God himself has transported Ezekiel (40:3a), but then Ezekiel perceives a man looking like copper. He has a linen measuring line and a measuring rod in his hand (40:3a β). And he addresses Ezekiel in the same way God so far used to do (כִּי-נְאָמֵן), commanding him to pay attention to everything he will show him in order to tell it to the Israelites later on (40:4). This "man" is characterized as a supernatural being by the metallic radiance³⁸. One remembers the man in Ezek 8:2 who was described even more in terms of God himself (cf. Ezek 1:26b, 27a). In the present text of the book, the man in 8:2 seems to participate in transporting Ezekiel. The man in 40:3 has got some equipment, a trait which recalls the seven men in Ezek 9:1-10:7*. The measuring instruments point to his main activity, the measuring of the Temple area and building (Ezek 40-42)³⁹. At the same time he functions as Ezekiel's guide⁴⁰ taking him along within the Temple area so that Ezekiel witnesses his measuring activity. As compared to the measuring and guiding he does

37 Cf. Ezekiel's transportation to Jerusalem in 8:3. Here he is carried to the mythological mountain of God (Zimmerli, *Ezechiel* 997), it is a "theological geography" (Allen, *Ezekiel* 229, referring to Isa 2:2).

38 Cf. the beings carrying God's throne in 1:7.

39 Cf. the 19 occurrences of the "measurement formula" (Allen, *Ezekiel* 228): Ezek 40:6, 8, 11, 13, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, 32, 47, 48; 41:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 13, 15.

40 Cf. the "guidance formulas" (Allen, *Ezekiel* 228) Ezek 40:17, 24, 28, 32, 35, 48; 41:1; 42:1.

not talk much, giving only very few explanations to Ezekiel⁴¹. The focus is obviously on *visualizing* the Temple area. It has been noticed time and again that Ezek 40-42 offers an architectural ground plan⁴². Thus the role of the man measuring is primarily to dramatize the description which was also stylized as a "guidance report"⁴³.

Apart from Ezek 40-42 the man appears in 43:6b where he stands silently beside Ezekiel while God's glory is addressing the prophet. The insertion in 43:6b wants to indicate that the man and God are not identical. After this the man retires to the background. Next time we hear of him is in Ezek 47:1-12 in the account of the stream of water flowing from the Temple and affecting the land in a miraculous way. 47:3-7* again present the man as he is using his measuring line to measure distances of 1000 cubits (47:3-5). He does so four times and at each point he makes Ezekiel experience the depth of the water which is increasing rapidly, thus illustrating the abundance of water and blessing. This physical involvement of the prophet in the vision surpasses Ezekiel's former participation as he becomes comparatively active.

The man, whom we might call an angel because he is clearly a supernatural being, serves as Ezekiel's guide, and, as Ezekiel observes him measuring, helps the prophet to come to know the exact measures for a detailed description of the Temple's ground plan. He is not so much an interpreter then, but rather a guide. In spite of this, critics of Zech 1-6 have taken this man in Ezek 40-48 as the predecessor of Zechariah's interpreting angel; in addition, commentators unanimously point to Ez 40-48 as a model when they discuss Zechariah's third vision (Zech 2:5-9)⁴⁴. Is this solution probable?

The answer depends on how one thinks about the genesis of Ezek 40-48. Zimmerli's commentary may serve as an example for the more traditional view which takes the man as guide and measuring surveyor to be part of the original layer of Ezek 40-42⁴⁵ which he attributed to Ezekiel himself. Some decades before Hölscher⁴⁶ had argued that, al-

41 Ezek 40:45f.; 41:4, 22; 42:13. These are even superfluous; they are obviously intended to point out parts of the Temple that are considered most important and holy. Probably they are supplementary comments.

42 This made Cooke, Book 425, think that Ezekiel was in fact brooding on a plan which prompted his ecstatic experience. Allen, Ezekiel 228, says that the account is dependent on a ground-plan. There are only two vertical elements mentioned (Ezek 40:6 [steps]; 41:6-8 [storeys]). As Zimmerli, Ezechiel 992, remarks, we do not learn anything about materials.

43 Cf. Fuhs, Ezechiel 227f.; cf. also Vogt, Untersuchungen 137.

44 Cf. e.g. Hanhart, Sacharja 124-127; Delkurt, Nachtgesichte 106-112.

45 Zimmerli, Ezechiel 979, takes 40:1-37, 47-49 and 41:1-4 as the original text.

46 Hesekiel 189-212.

though Ezek 40-42 form the basis of the final vision, Ezekiel cannot be the author of it because the prophet is taken around by God himself in the authentic vision in Ezek 8-9. More recent criticism has shown that the man was not included in the basic layer of Ezek 40-48, but is a later addition. As E. Vogt demonstrated, the original text of the final vision only comprised Ezek 40:1-2 (the transportation), 43:4-6a, 7 (the return of God's glory), and 47:1-12* (the spring in the Temple)⁴⁷. Ez 40:3-4 functions as an introduction to the detailed description of the Temple⁴⁸. T.A. Rudnig⁴⁹ presented a slightly modified hypothesis, but he in principle agrees that the passages mentioning the man equipped with the measuring instruments⁵⁰ are late additions which he calls the "Mann-Bearbeitung"; according to him they originate from the third century BCE⁵¹.

If this analysis is correct, then Zech 1-6 cannot depend on Ezek 40-48 – at least insofar as the interpreting angel is concerned. The man measuring the Temple area in Ezekiel's vision is just a literary means to dramatize the description of the Temple's ground plan. As he is a supernatural being, one may call him an angel. For the visionary, however, he is a guide, not an interpreter. Considering Zechariah's night visions the man in Ezekiel is not a model for the interpreting angel; instead, he reminds of the man with the measuring line who is ready to measure the expansion of future Jerusalem (Zech 2:5-6). So Ezekiel's man may be inspired by Zechariah's third vision.

4. Angelic Interpreters in Dan 7-12

A collection of visions makes up the second half of the Book of Daniel. As R.G. Kratz has recently shown⁵² they are literary compositions intended to interpret the historical situation of their authors viz. redactors from the 160ies BCE onwards. Since the composition of Zechariah's night visions (and the insertion of the "man" in Ezekiel's final vision) some time – maybe centuries – has passed. This interval is felt also with regard to the phenomenon of the interpreting angel, who is needed more than ever because the imagery employed in the visions has be-

47 Cf. Vogt, *Untersuchungen* 127-175. This analysis was adopted by Fuhs, *Ezechiel*.

48 According to Fuhs, *Ezechiel* 227, 40:3-4 was inspired by 8:2-3 and introduces the original layer of the detailed description (40:6-37, 47-49; 41:1-8, 9-15a; 42:15-18).

49 Cf. Heilig, and more recently, *Ezechiel* 40-48 527-630.

50 Namely, 40:3(f.*); 42: 15-20*; 43:6b; 47:3-7* and the measurement formulas in 40-41.

51 Cf. *Ezechiel* 40-48 538; the same is true for 8:2-3a.

52 Cf. Kratz, *Visionen*, cf. the English version *Visions*.

come more bizarre. As above, we will concentrate on the supernatural interpreters – in the order of their appearance in the book.

The first vision report shares several characteristics particularly with Zechariah's night visions. The Aramaic vision in Dan 7 first gives a date and explicitly says in third person narrative that the vision happened at night: It was a dream Daniel had in his bed (7:1). With 7:2 the point of view switches to first person narrative, and Daniel himself says that he had the vision at night. After describing the vision (7:2b-15) Daniel remembers his reaction: He felt shocked and scared, obviously because he did not understand what he had seen. Therefore, he approaches someone belonging to the supernatural personnel who is part of the vision and asks him to interpret it which he does willingly (7:16)⁵³. The person addressed is not identified precisely. Probably he is one of those worshipping the very old one on the throne (7:9-10), that is to say a member of the divine assembly. When the interpretation is finished Daniel tells the reader again his own reaction (7:28).

Another date (8:1) opens the first of the sequence of Hebrew visions (8-12). The vision proper begins like Zechariah's night visions with the phrase **אָרֶן נְשָׁא עַיִן** and the presentative **הִנֵּה** (8:3). Again, after the description (8:3b-13) Daniel feels at a loss because he does not know what to make of the vision (8:15a)⁵⁴. Daniel's wish to understand seems to make an interpreter emerge: out of a sudden someone looking like a (strong, young) man (**גָּבָר**)⁵⁵ stands before him (8:15b), and he hears a human voice (which turns out to be God's, though) that addresses the man with his name Gabriel, and orders him to interpret the vision for Daniel (8:16). Gabriel obeys, but before he can do so there is an additional scene (8:17-18): As Gabriel approaches Daniel gets frightened and falls prostrate. This incident recalls Ezekiel's reaction to the vision of God (Ezek 1:28b), so that here God's messenger / angel is depicted as YHWH's equivalent by the allusion. Gabriel's addressing Daniel as "mortal" (**בּוֹנָדָם**) quotes God addressing Ezekiel like this throughout the book. Gabriel's first words make Daniel swoon (8:18a) which is more than what happens to Ezekiel. Whereas God's word raises Ezekiel (Ezek 2:1-2), Gabriel's touch helps Daniel to recover and stand erect again (Dan 8:18b). The remark following the interpretation (8:27) –

53 After the short explication (7:17-18) Daniel describes the fourth horn and gets also information about this (7:19ff.). At least in part this passage will be an addition. Cf. Kratz, Visionen.

54 With 8:13f. a dialogue has been inserted which Daniel overhears (BHS is right to correct **לִי** and read **לִי** in v.14 instead). Two holy ones, i.e. members of the divine assembly, are talking about the calculation of time. For this cf. also 12:5-7.

55 That he is not introduced as an **שָׁנָא**, but as **גָּבָר** is due to the name "Gabriel": the noun is intended to allude etymologically to the name ("El's, i.e. God's man").

Daniel feels exhausted and falls ill for some days after the vision – reminds of Ezekiel feeling distracted for seven days (Ezek 3:15). The episode describing Daniel's visionary encounter with Gabriel, the interpreting angel, and the effect of the vision on Daniel are clearly modelled on Ezek 1-3. By alluding to this prophetic predecessor the redactor⁵⁶ who inserted these sentences emphasizes that the angel is God's true representative.

The latest chapter in the second half of Dan refers to Gabriel again (9:21-23) obviously presupposing 8:16⁵⁷. God reacts to Daniel's prayer by sending Gabriel⁵⁸. Gabriel is flying (9:21) – this implies that he is a winged being, a feature that never occurred with regard to an interpreting angel so far. Here Gabriel tells Daniel that his praying made a word – sc. of God – come forth and it is Gabriel's task to transmit it to Daniel. The last vision in the Book of Daniel (Dan 10-12) again offers new aspects with regard to the interpreting angel⁵⁹. First thing Daniel sees is a man standing there (10:5a). For the first time the outward appearance of an interpreting angel is now described (v.10:5b-6): He is clothed in linen (cf. Ezek 9:2)⁶⁰ – a feature of a priestly person. He wears a belt of gold. In spite of the clothing Daniel can perceive the angel's body which is like beryl or turquoise (חרשִׁישׁ), his face is like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, arms and feet like burnished copper or bronze (נְצָהָת), and the sound of his speech like the noise of a multitude. The elements that serve to describe the angel's appearance by comparison are all found in Ezekiel's vision of God⁶¹, namely in those parts characterizing the four beings carrying YHWH's throne. So the references to Ezekiel in Daniel's description allude to beings in the most immediate environment of God's throne. The passage suggests to the reader who is familiar with Ezekiel's vision that the man clothed like a priest is a celestial being very close to God⁶². Accordingly, Daniel will address the man as אֶלְנִי later on (10:16, 17, 19) – as Zechariah did⁶³.

56 Cf. Kratz, Visionen 228: V.16, 18f, 27b are additions inserted by the same hand.

57 Cf. Kratz, Visionen 234.

58 In 9:21 Gabriel is introduced as הָאֵשׁ.

59 There is an episode in 10:8-11 resembling 8:17-19, 27, so that Ezek 1:28-2:2 is evoked again.

60 The words אֵישׁ אֶחָד לְבוֹשׁ בְּלִימִים ... מַתְנִי are identical in Dan and Ezek.

61 Cf. Ezek 1:6; 10:9 referring to the wheels; ברק Ezek 1:13; לְפִידִי אֵשׁ Ezek 1:13; נְחַשְׁתָּ קָלָל Ezek 1:7; the noise is also part of Ezekiel's description, but, as the beings do not speak, it is the noise of their movement (cf. 1:24f.; 3:13).

62 But note that the angel is not (yet) winged as in the later passage in Dan :21.

63 When the angel talks to Daniel he cannot answer (10:15) until another humanoid being has touched his lips (10:16). This recalls Isa 6:7 (and alludes to Jer 1:9 as well). Obviously, in 10:16 the angel who appeared in 10:5 and the other humanoid are not

Now in Dan 10-12 it is open to debate whether the angel still functions as an interpreting angel in the strict sense of the term. The angel, who is also acting as a celestial warrior (10:13, 20), does not interpret a vision Daniel has just experienced, but reveals to him future events which are concealed to ordinary people. The long oracle he gives is not metaphorical or symbolical so that it would need explanation. In the immediate context the contents of Daniel's vision is the angel announcing what will happen. In the context of the book, however, the angel's words appear as an interpretation of the former vision (cf. 10:11, 14⁶⁴). In this sense the angel comes close to the one visiting the Virgin Mary and announcing to her the miraculous birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).

5. Conclusion

The history of the *angelus interpres* in writings of the Hebrew Bible is a short one: Since the man with the measuring line in Ezekiel's final vision turned out to be a late addition to the Book of Ezekiel, one cannot regard him any longer as paving the way for the interpreting angel who appears in Zechariah's night visions for the first time. Probably the origin of the *angelus interpres* is to be found in the concept of a divine assembly. Zechariah's interpreting angel is only characterized through his function. At the time when the Book of Daniel was composed, the interpreting angel is also described in terms of his outward appearance – and he has got a name, Gabriel. Thus he has become more of a personality. The authors of Dan clarify that the angel is very close to God: In the contact with the visionary he resembles YHWH as depicted in Ezek 1:28-2:2. His outward appearance, though, is likened to that of the celestial beings carrying YHWH's throne in Ezekiel, i.e. to God's most immediate servants. As the authors of Dan allude to Ezekiel's initial vision of YHWH several times, Ezek comes in as a point of reference at last.

Anyway, the interpreting angel clearly occurs in post-exilic times only. His existence is indicative of a theological tendency to increase God's transcendent nature. At the same time God is still present and still in contact with the world, and he still reveals his word to special persons. At least part – and increasingly more so – of God's revelations

identical. In 10:18 the humanoid again touches Daniel's lips; it is not quite clear whether he is also the speaker in 10:19; this would rather be the angel who has spoken before.

64 Cf. Kratz, Visionen 232.

occur in visionary contexts, and they are explained or even transmitted by an emissary, an angel, the *angelus interpres* who functions as God's representative.

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